



Children, Young People and Education Committee report: *Degrees of Separation? The Impact of Brexit on Higher and Further Education*

Report Briefing – December 2018

The Council of Deans of Health briefing document summarises the Welsh Assembly's Children, Young People and Education Committee report '*Degrees of Separation? The Impact of Brexit on Higher and Further Education*'. The Committee undertook an inquiry to look at the impact of Brexit and the Welsh Government's approach to it. The Council of Deans of Health Wales submitted a [response](#) to the inquiry which took place between May to September 2018.

It should also be noted that the Welsh Assembly's External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee published a [report](#) in November 2018 on the preparedness of the healthcare and medicines sector in Wales for Brexit.

Report Summary

Key conclusions

- A favourable Brexit deal will still necessitate the higher education sector to change in key areas, and the further education sector will need to adapt to adjustments in their local economies
- A 'no-deal' situation would cause substantial disruption for both higher education and further education, and particularly more so for higher education due to international collaborations and participation in research networks.
- Few opportunities for higher education or further education were identified as arising from Brexit in the short-term.

Key issues and recommendations

Immigration restrictions for EU staff and students

The Committee recognises that changes to the UK's immigration system greatly affect universities in terms of recruitment, retaining researchers of international standing, student experience and student outcomes. The Committee report recommends that the Welsh Government demand executive powers for Welsh Ministers that allow them to make immigration rules specifically for students and academic staff in Wales.

Withdrawal of Tuition Fee Grants and potential loss of student loans

UCAS applications data shows a 10 per cent drop in EU demand to study in Wales so far in 2018/19 which the Committee suggests is not just an impact of Brexit but also due to the withdrawal of the TFG. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government commission research into the motivations of EU and international students coming to study in Wales which looks at the impact of the TFG and assesses financial incentives.

Existing funding pressures and student recruitment

The report highlights that a difference is being increasingly seen in Welsh and English higher education sectors in recruitment performance with 'higher tariff' institutions and those with a strong international presence have higher recruitment levels. The Committee recognises that this is a UK wide issue and not a result of Brexit. However, the Committee believes that the Welsh Government should assist universities 'to mitigate the impact any reduced EU student recruitment would have on existing recruitment pressures'. The Committee supports the Global Wales II programme. However, it wants reassurance that the programme benefits those institutions most at risk of a fall in EU student recruitment and it recommends an evaluation of [Global Wales I](#) is published as well as the objectives and expected benefits of Global Wales II.

ERASMUS+

The Council of Deans of Health is pleased that the Committee shares the view that there are clear benefits to universities engaging in Erasmus+. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government work with the higher and further education sectors to implement funding arrangements that will ensure no financial uncertainty for ERASMUS+ students taking into account the conditions attached to the current Treasury guarantee. The Committee asks the Welsh Government to report back on this and on research into the impact of international mobility on the outcomes of students from under-represented groups in Wales.

Replacing EU funding

The Committee noted that EU funding which Welsh higher and further education sectors use will have to be replaced, and this is likely to see a move towards UK funding which has different processes. It was highlighted that the EU funding which sustains the Welsh Government's work-based learning programme will end in 2023. The report also highlights the uncertainty around future regional investment and that the Welsh Government should take into account and work with the higher education sector when developing future proposals. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government press the UK Government on future regional investment being a devolved Welsh solution and follow through on its commitment that future regional investment will not be subsumed into Welsh core-budgets and will remain multi-annual.

Challenges faced by Welsh research and innovation

The Committee recognises that Welsh research and innovation activity faces a number of important challenges that go beyond funding. The Committee supports the Reid review that Welsh universities need to become more competitive at winning wider UK funding to replace reliance on EU structural funding. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government recognises the fundamental importance of

research and innovation to the prosperity of Wales and recognises the implications in falling behind England and Scotland in funding these activities. The Committee believes that the Welsh Government must therefore fund the recommendations made by Professor Reid in his review.

Welsh Government preparedness for Brexit

The Committee acknowledges that the Welsh Government has undertaken actions to prepare the sectors for Brexit. It welcomes the establishment of the Higher Education Brexit Working Group and the guarantee of student financial support to EU students starting their courses in 2019/20. However, the Committee is dissatisfied with some aspects of the Welsh Government's Brexit preparations. The Committee report has made recommendations related to two of the Government's own Brexit initiatives, the Global Wales programme and funding the Reid review recommendations.

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